

Effects of Nomadic Migration on the Sustainability of Peasant Farming and Food Security in Southwestern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

During the last two decades, nomadic migration has evolved into a major national issue in Nigeria, although in the almost complete absence of any institutional framework or any shared political culture, for its national governance and control. Series of violent communal clashes in recent years have been attributed to the conflict of interest between *Fulani* cattle herdsman and host communities. This study therefore set out to investigate, through field survey, the impact of recent influx of nomadic *Fulani* on the sustainability of peasant farming and food security in southwestern Nigeria. A Respondents Network Model (RNM) was used to locate 76 herdsman during questionnaire administration while simple random sampling method was employed to elicit information from 120 heads of household at four settlements within the catchment areas. Data analysis shows that climate change, unreliable rainfall regime and gradual disappearance of grasses and eventual desertification of the erstwhile savanna region of northern Nigeria are major push factors for recent influx of nomadic migrants while overgrazing, forceful encroachment into farmlands, security threat, mindless killings, massive rural outmigration, and acute shortage of farm labour are some of the effects in the study area. This study recommends ratification of national legislation to redress the incessant conflicts between the nomads and host communities.

Keywords: Conflict, Host Communities, Nomadic Migration, Respondent Network Model

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a way of life of the nomadic *Fulani* of northern Nigeria, especially in the savannah region (specifically the north-east and north-west zones) where there is a long dry season followed by a short wet season. Rather than being an itinerant race, the *Fulani* herdsman move constantly from their small make-shift communities to live with their cattle wherever there is availability of pastures to feed their animals [1]. The duration of stay in any settlement by the *Fulani* herdsman could be very brief or last for some months depending on the sustainability of the fodder pasture and absence of tsetse fly that could threaten the survival and healthy living of their cattle.

Nigeria has a tropical climate with variable rainy and dry seasons, depending on locations. It is hot and wet most of the year in the south-west while a savanna climate, with marked wet and dry seasons, prevails in the north. *Fulani* herdsman usually gather their livestock at the onset of the dry season in northern Nigeria, during the second half of October, to start their migration south, leaving the care of their villages to the elderly men and women who could not endure the long journey. They migrate in groups consisting of between 5 to 10 families; each possessing about 30 herds of cattle. The migrating herdsman bring their cattle back for grazing in the fallow lands of the north at the commencement of the rains, to escape from the advancing tsetse fly (in the south-west), and threat it poses to their cattle.

The arrival of the early migratory *Fulani* nomads was not only of great historical importance but also acted as a catalyst to the rapid diffusion of Islamic faith in the southwestern Nigeria during the 19th century. A cordial relationship existed between the nomadic *Fulani* and their host communities (mainly *Yoruba* speaking tribe) in the southern part as the herdsman were seen as the 'expected annual migrants accompanied by egrets' just like pilgrims. The pastoral *Fulani* live from their cattle. The main trade is in their surplus animals. They also sell milk, hides, skin, butter and cheese or barter all these things for cereals, vegetables and other goods they need. Apart from the supply of meat and other animal products such as milk and butter cheese, *Fulani* herdsman were patronized by the *Yoruba* people in the south-west for their great knowledge of local medicinal herbs.

The root economy of the rain forest region of the southwestern Nigeria is agriculture. The fertility of the land is maintained by leaving it fallow, the period being dictated largely by the degree of agricultural population pressure. The farming system in the very densely populated areas is based on the rotation of crops; use of household refuse and the application of fertilizers. Cassava, yams, cocoyam, maize and plantains are cultivated for food. Cocoa, coffee, kola nuts and palm produce constitute the major export crops [2].

The southwestern zone is dominated by the *Yoruba* speaking tribe. There is a clear difference in the appearance, language, occupation and culture of the nomadic *Fulani* from the far north and their *Yoruba* counterpart in the south-west. Notwithstanding the contrast, mutual understanding existed between the *Fulani* herdsman and the peasant farmers of the south-west until recently when violent clashes were reported almost on daily basis. The present situation, if not carefully managed, can impact negatively on livelihood of peasant farmers as well as food production in the region. This has therefore brought to limelight the need to evaluate the causes and consequences of this migration pattern in order to proffer sustainable solutions to the problem.

Literature Review

Migration offers many opportunities, but it also involves many complex challenges [3]. Nigeria practices a non-regulatory internal migration system with families and communities, most times, forced to adjust grudgingly to unforeseen human addition [4]. With the attainment of independence in 1960 a number of developments took place. The post-independence period in the 1960s saw the emergence of Nigeria as a federated unit followed by creation of states and local government areas [5]. Overseas markets became available for the sale of tropical crops directly by the local farmers.

The development of these cash crops caused an increase in the extent and intensity of land under cultivation. The erstwhile forest areas were intensively cultivated and fallow periods became shortened. The adoption of cash crops such as cocoa, coffee and *kola nut*, in southwestern Nigeria also led to the establishment of several plantations. Hence, previous fallow lands were used for cash crop plantations [6]. The region also attracted in-migration of rural tenant farmers from different parts of the country especially the South-East where fertile agricultural lands were inadequate to cater for the high population in the area.

Apart from the improved agricultural practices, the prospects of white collar employment in Lagos, the seat of the federal government, where over 60 percent of the country's industrial establishments were located attracted a lot of migrants to the region [7]. By early 1970s, the South-West became the most preferred destination for migrants in the country. During this period, urbanization and urban development also became very pronounced leading

to encroachment on the erstwhile arable farmlands at the urban fringes [8].

An acute dearth of data on migration has been one of the factors responsible for the relatively few substantive works on nomadic migration in Nigeria. However, (Samuel, 2012) identified the main sources of nomadic migration as the densely populated regions of the northern Nigeria and the ecologically threatened areas. Some of the migrants' characteristics were highlighted, one of which is the selectivity nature of the migration process which leads to a preponderance of young, adult males, aged 15-45 in the migration streams [9]. Others are that, often, these migrants are accompanied by their wives and children and are mostly illiterates, which are a reflection of their job, transhumance [10].

The length of stay of the nomadic migrants may be temporary or seasonal depending on so many factors [11]. Of recent however, many of them are staying for longer periods and becoming permanent. Rather than the usual north-south and south-north movements during the dry and wet seasons respectively; the herdsman now migrate to the south-west in large number all year round. Rather than the earlier contacts with towns such as Shaki, Okeho and Kishi and Igboora in the northern part of the present Oyo State., the pastoralists extend their journey to new lands with abundant pastures annually. This led to the arrival of cattle *Fulanis* in places like Ada, Ejigbo and Osogbo (Osun state), Akure, Ikare and Owo (Ondo state), Joga Orile, Owode, Ayetoro and Sagamu in Ogun State.

They usually build make-shift huts called '*Gaa*' [12], where women milked the cows and also served as shelter in the night. Rather than receding, *Fulani* herdsman moved several kilometers southward to new locations on arrival each year. Before the end of 1990s, the nomads have established their '*gaa*' in almost all the states in the southwestern Nigeria, except Lagos. Attempts by land owners to protest the trespasses and illegal occupation of their land have several times resulted into violent clashes between the cattle herdsman and land owners or the host communities.

In the past, both the periods of arrival and departure of the *Fulani* nomads were clearly defined and as a result their brief stay at the rural fringes of villages or towns caused little or no damages to the host environments [13]. In fact, the cow dung often replenished the previously

cultivated land and added manure which improve crop yield for some farmers. This pattern of migration therefore continued for almost a century without notable records of conflicts between the cattle rustlers and the peasant farmers.

A prolonged duration of grazing which sometimes qualifies the nomads as permanent migrants and subsequent encroachment into subsistence agricultural lands is a major source of violent clashes which has resulted into lost of lives and destruction of farmlands and properties in places like Saki, Iseyin, Igboho, Igboora and Ogbomosho. Similar violent clashes were also reported in Benue and Cross Rivers [14], Kwara, Kogi, Nasarawa, Plateau [15] and Enugu states [16]. The recent influx of nomads and the consequences of their prolonged stay in the rural areas of the southwestern Nigeria therefore deserve empirical examination in order to eradicate the menace of wanton destruction of lives and properties which could lead to rapid disintegration of the country.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research work was carried out in the southwestern zone of Nigeria. The zone comprises of six federated states (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo) with the *Yorubas* as the dominant tribe. Two major nomadic regions (Igboora, Ibarapa Central in Oyo State) and Joga Orile (Yewa North, Ogun State) were purposely selected for the study in order to have a fair coverage of an area (Oyo) with early interaction with the nomadic migrants and another (Ogun) with recent experience.

Due to frequent mobility of herdsmen and their cattle, and extreme difficulty in locating nomadic *Fulani* and their grazing fields especially during the day, a Respondents Network Model (RNM) was used to interview the nomads at selected grazing zones. The RNM is a technique for data collection that is appropriate for de-jure or hard-to-reach population such as nomadic pastoralists, scattered population, displaced persons, return migrants and locally integrated or reintegrated refugees. With RNM, a respondent catchment area (RCA) is delineated and a starting point (OR = origin) is selected from where the subsequent nodes ($N_1 - N_x$) are located. The description of route leading to location of the subsequent nearest node is imposed in the questionnaire while answer to such question gives direction to the nearest grazing field. The process continues until the delineated catchment area is covered (Figure 1).

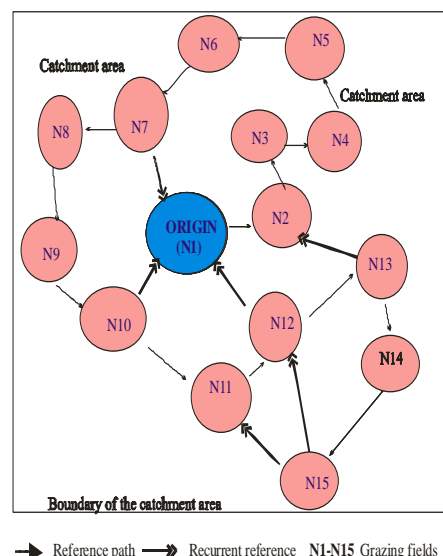


Figure 1: Schematics of Respondent Network Model (RNM)

Depending on the scope of a study, the respondent catchment area (RCA) may be few kilometers wide or it could cover several kilometers. Subsequent nodes are visited following the described paths until recurrent referrals (RR) are encountered. Note, once the existing nodes are exhausted, researcher will encounter frequent or repeated references to nodes already visited until no new nodes are observed. During the course of field work for this study, a total of 42 nodes (informal grazing fields) were visited with 76 cattle herdsmen available for questionnaire administration.

In addition, simple random sampling method was used to select 120 respondents (heads of households, peasant farmers and custodians of community farmlands.) from 8 settlements among the host communities within the catchment area. The questionnaire focused on migration processes, demographic characteristics, notable challenges as well as coping strategies among others. Information was also gathered from opinion leaders, village heads and security agencies- the police, vigilante groups and local security outfits. Both descriptive (including frequency count, percentile, map etc) and inferential statistics (linear regression, correlation analysis) were used to analyze the data at $p < .05$.

Results and findings

Analyses of data from the field survey showed that majority (68%) of the *Fulani* herdsmen are youths below the age of forty years. A high rate (75.4%) of illiteracy (in western education) was reported but majority (83.8%) of the nomads could read and

write in Arabic language while many others could speak French language even though they could neither read nor write. Notwithstanding the high rate of illiteracy among the nomads, majority (87.2%) of them possessed at least one ICT gadget especially transistor radio. This is an indication that the nomadic migrants are usually updated with information concerning the situations both in their immediate environment and around the world.

On the other hand, 57.2 percent of indigenous settlers interviewed were above fifty years of age. There is a significant relationship ($\beta = 0.37$, $p < .05$) between age of respondents and frequency of conflicts. The generation gap between the ages of the migrant nomads and the indigenous peasant farmers could also aid misunderstanding resulting from values and experiences. The literacy rate was high (83.0%), although majority (74.5%) have only obtained primary school certificate

The study revealed that above 50 percent of the herdsmen have stayed for a period of between two and six years in their present locations while another 30.4 percent arrived within the last one year. There were also instances of those who have been occupying the same 'gaa' for over a decade. Climate change was the most prominent reason given by 77.5 percent of the nomads for their continuous stay in the south west. Other reasons included insufficient pasture (55.7%), lack of mixed farming (43.1%), and inadequate water (68.3%) in the northern region.

Majority (93.6%) of the respondents among host communities lamented high level of insecurity due to the presence and proliferation of arms among the nomads. Other negative effects of the nomadic migration reported in the study area included trespassing (85.0%), forceful encroachment into farmlands (83.4%), sedentary nature of migration resulting into overgrazing (62.0%), environmental degradation (56.2%) incessant fights with other settlers (58.7%), kidnapping (44.0%), violent clashes (74.5%), bullying (52.3%), mindless killings (48.0%), wanton destruction of properties (67.3%), reprisal attacks (65.6%) and disrespect for the rule of law and local custom (71.4%) among others.

Statistical computation of data collected at the security outposts showed that a significant relationship ($\beta=0.43$, $r = 0.57$) exists between length of stay and frequency of conflict between nomads and villagers. The longer the period of

grazing the more the frequency of conflict with the host peasant farmers who would have lost interest in the presence of the herdsmen. This is a clear reflection of the 'hospitality fatigue' exhibited by the host communities against continuous occupation of their farmlands. A positive correlation ($r = 0.62$) also existed between frequency of violent clashes and rate of out-migration from the rural areas.

Consequences on food security

In the process of creating development the cultured human being has turned out to be the most dynamic agent of transformation and destruction of the environment. And since all development is targeted at people, human beings are also the main beneficiaries of the products obtained from the exploitation of the environment. The audacity with which the nomads shepherd their flocks along slopes and farmlands has led to rapid increase of gully erosion on their grazing routes. This has often attracted protests from various affected communities where crops are frequently being washed away by erosion during rainfalls.

The negative effects of uncontrolled nomadic activities on vegetal biodiversity of southwestern Nigeria are also enormous. There is a remarkable disappearance of some economically viable rain forest plant species, which are being replaced by savanna grasses or perpetual aridity due to overgrazing.

It is usual for migrants to move with their culture and traditions, some of which are often beneficial to the host community. But, they equally migrate with some ailments that sometimes create health hazards at the destination. Recently, the outbreak of 'tomato ebola'- a viral disease formerly restricted to the northern region, was traced to the diffusion of the virus through the nomadic paths. The virus attacked and destroyed many tomato farms in the southwestern Nigeria and this resulted into very low output of tomato among peasant farmers in the region.

Apart from language and cultural barriers that usually spot out the nomads as strangers, the audacity with which they shepherd their flocks on every available farmlands has led to wanton destruction of several indigenous peasant farmlands. They wander with their cattle across farmlands while the animals trample upon and also feed indiscriminately on crops, including cereal and

legumes. As a result, food crops worth 4 billion naira (about USD2 million) were reported to have been destroyed by the activities of the nomads within six months of the annual planting season.

Within a period of two years, more than one hundred and fifty seven peasant farmers were killed within the region while several others were injured or kidnapped during violent clashes. This has therefore resulted to massive rural out-migration especially among the able bodied youths who left the care of farm holdings to the elderly in the rural areas. The frequent attacks have serious implication for shortage of farm labour and eventually reduction in agricultural produce in the affected area thereby threatens the continuity and sustainability of peasant farming and food production and supply from the affected region.

In a technology deficient Third World country like Nigeria, the most basic resource is the land and the plants that grow, or are cultivated on the land; however without peace arable land cannot be cultivated. The fear of attacks by Fulani nomad has also discouraged vehicular access to some of the remote rural areas where food crops were hitherto bought and transported to towns for sale to the urban dwellers. The challenges pose by nomadic migration in Nigeria can not be underestimated as the consequences remain undesirable either by the local peasant farmers or the nation at large.

The way forward

Migration has been a major process that shaped the traditional Nigerian society as it is today. Its impact has been economic, social, cultural, political and environmental. Violent conflicts and the threat of violent conflict are the most important impediments to economic growth [17] in Nigeria. Economic progress is impossible in a country where war, insurgency, and terrorism prevent agricultural production, creates hundreds of thousands of refugees and displaced persons, and divert precious resources into massive arms purchases and military buildings. These violent conflicts have compounded Nigeria's woe, a country that is currently battling with the deadly Boko Haram insurgence in the northeastern geo-political zone. In addition to the untold hardship to Nigerians, neighbouring countries suffer substantially from refugee flows, trade and transportation interruptions, and uncontrolled cross-border arms movements.

Both the patterns of rainfall and evapo-transpiration across the country have changed overtime as a result of climate change and global warming. This could be linked to alterations in the seasonal locations of the Inter-Tropical Convergent Zone (ITCZ) and rainfall regimes across the country as a result of global warming. This has serious effects on desertification of the erstwhile savanna region of the northern Nigeria and as a result, Fulani herdsmen are no longer sure of adequate supply of pastures at any period of the year. Therefore rather than the traditional north-south movements during the dry season followed by south-north homeward journey through the same routes at the onset of the rainfall, a prolonged duration of grazing which sometimes qualifies the nomads as permanent migrants is practiced.

Considering the non-regulatory internal migration system in Nigeria, communities most times are forced to adjust grudgingly to unforeseen human addition. There is a remarkable unhealthy rivalry between host communities and the nomadic herdsmen leading to incessant loss of lives and property. As a result, many peasant farmers lived in fear while others have abandoned their farmlands for the fear of reprisal attacks or being kidnapped by the nomadic herdsmen. Some host communities have also forbade the possession of all kinds of weapons by the nomads whenever they were visiting local markets.

It is noteworthy that there is no one general law guiding the activities of nomadic pastoralists in Nigeria. Although government of the defunct Northern Region of Nigeria enacted a Grazing Reserve Law in 1965 to give legal backing to the numerous grazing reserves earlier created by the Fulani rulers during the colonial era, such a law is yet to be enacted at the federal level. A bill to create grazing reserves and livestock routes across the country is still under consideration in the National Assembly [18]. There is therefore the need for a comprehensive law that will guide the activities of cattle rustlers which may include but not limited to the creation of grazing reserves. The law enforcement officers should be given adequate investigative tools while severe punishment should be specified for offenders.

There is an urgent need for the ratification and implementation of national legislation to redress the incessant conflicts between the nomads and host communities, mostly the peasant farmers. To

better combat the excesses of cattle rustlers and its attendant damaging effects throughout Nigerian society, will require the energy, talents and resources of government, international cooperation and civil society.

Porous borders and desperately poor economic conditions in West African sub-region have prompted people to migrate to trade and farm. Increasing security at border posts, and adequately equipping law enforcement agencies to check the schemes of the cattle rustlers will go a long way in reducing the proliferation of smuggled sophisticated arms among the nomadic Fulani herdsmen migrating into the country uncontrolled. This could be linked to the free movement across national borders within the West Africa which has recently been facilitated by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Protocol on Free Movement and Establishment. This has encouraged influx of nomads and their animals from other countries to Nigeria through the numerous land borders in the northern region of the country.

It is however imperative to note that punitive measures alone can not solve migration problems provided the push forced still persist at the origin. Climate change is a major factor that affects our water resources especially in terms of quantities as well as spatial and seasonal variations. This is because ultimately the amounts of water resources both surface and underground, available for vegetative growth, are determined by the excess of rainfall over evapotranspiration. Both the patterns of rainfall and evapotranspiration have changed overtime as a result of global warming. In this vein therefore, the Federal Government through the Millennium Development Agencies (MDAs) could assist the nomads by drilling more bore holes and wells in the savanna region to get underground water for livestock. This will alleviate the problem of scarcity of water which is a major push factor that forces the nomads to migrate at all cost.

Government efforts at redressing the menace of the cattle herdsmen are usually characterized by a multitude of agencies working alongside one another, often in an uncoordinated manner. True impact will only be achieved if governments at various levels coordinate their inputs towards reducing the effects of climate change which has increased the rate of desert encroachment as well

as shortage of water at the source region of the migrating nomads.

It is safe to say that the recent nomads-farmers crises stem from migratory practices that have existed for centuries but was not properly regulated by the concerned authority. Nomadic Fulani nowadays embarked on prolonged grazing periods in the south-west and as a result encroached into subsistence agricultural lands creating a major source of concern to the peaceful co-existence in the affected regions. There is no clear evidence to show that the federal government has adopted a decisive measure to stop the menace of the incessant conflicts between the nomads and the host communities, although a bill is presently under debate at the Senate, the efforts are yet to succeed in solving the problem.

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